Grace Group Guide

Jonah: Week 1; Chapter 1

In 1967 a man name Paul Anka penned the words to a song that would later be recorded by Frank Sinatra and a whole slew of other artists. The song was called “My Way.” You can glean at least some idea of what the song was about just from the title. It is indeed a song about how at the end of the day, the author did things “his way.” On the level of earth, it sounds wonderful. I didn’t give in to this or that; I didn’t go back on my convictions and whatnot…I did things my way.

For the believer it’s hard to take that same approach to life. As we saw previously in Colossians, when we come to know the Lord we ultimately die to “our way,” and embrace “His way.” Sometimes it’s easier said than done and that is the background of the story we pick up on in Jonah chapter 1. This chapter deals with God calling Jonah to go “His way” to Nineveh in order that he might preach to the people there. Jonah chooses however to do things “my way,” and ends up getting a rude awakening as he finds out the wonderful truth of God pursuing him and doing whatever was necessary to accomplish His purposes.

If you need to refresh your memory on the account, take a moment and re-read chapter 1.

We heard several times on Sunday morning that Nineveh was simply the occasion that God used to bring Jonah to a place of surrender and thus also bringing him more into line with the heart of God. **Thinking back on your own life, what occasion(s) has God used to get your attention and redirect you from a place of desiring to do things your way and instead doing things His way?**

Pastor John MacArthur has a wonderful testimony regarding his call to ministry and his refusal to accept that call and the means that God used to pursue him. He shares that testimony in one of his messages about Jonah and this is what he says: *“God called me to the ministry, I think when I was fairly young, and I knew it, and I didn't hear a voice out of Heaven saying, "Be a preacher," and I didn't have any specific visions. I just knew in my heart this is what God wanted me to do, and I didn't want to do it. I wanted to be a professional athlete, and that's what I wanted to do, and so I decided I'd do that. Well, somebody talked me into going to a Christian college and I hated the place. I arrived there and after two weeks, I said, "God, I don't like this place," and I didn't communicate much with God in those days, but I was mad at God, and remember praying, and I said, "God, I'm going to do what I want to do."*

*And like Jonah, I ran. That's exactly what I did, and I had a miserable year. Oh, I was so miserable. I was miserable from the beginning to the end. They tried to help me at the school. They tried to help me every way, academically, spiritually, socially. They even assigned a date to me one time. They tried everything to help me. Finally, God had tried to speak to me through the year, and I suppose I had a façade of spirituality, but in my heart I knew everything was wrong, not right, and I was running from God. I didn't want to read my Bible, didn't want to do anything like that. I just put on a front. I got in the car one day, and I was coming home, and I was running. I was coming to California. I was going to pick up an athletic scholarship. I was ready to play football and all these other things.*

*The only thing that happened was the car flipped going 75 miles an hour, and just like Jonah got thrown out of the ship, I got thrown out of the car. I flew out of the car, and I hit the highway going 75. I slid down the highway about, oh, I guess a little over a hundred yards on my southern hemisphere, and 64 square inches of my back was just cut out a half-inch deep. I had third-degree burns everywhere from friction and so forth. I was torn up pretty badly. Well, I was conscious through all of this, and I...I can identify with Jonah going down in the water. I was going along the highway, see.*

*Finally, I stopped rolling, and I stood right up and walked off the highway. Still totally conscious. I had the sense to walk off the highway. I didn't want to get in an accident…*

*You know, it was at that point in my life, standing on that highway, that I said, " God, I...I can't fight You." I said, "I'll do anything You want me to do." That was the very words. I'll never forget it. I said, "If You've got a little job, give me the grace to do it and be satisfied. If You got a big job, give me the ability to do it and be humble." I said, "Here I am." And you know what? God in His wonderful, wonderful grace said, "All right, MacArthur, I'll try it a second time. I'd like you to go into the ministry."*

I’ll add that was over 40 years ago when those events took place and MacArthur has been faithfully carrying out the preaching of the Word of God since then.

We also saw that God used whatever means were necessary to redirect Jonah. **As you read chapter 1, what miraculous things did you see God use in order to change Jonah’s direction?**

My mom shared another testimony about neglecting a call to obedience and the consequences of it and in this case, God used undercooked food at Cracker Barrel. Not quite as miraculous, but effective, nonetheless.

*“We were traveling to FL to visit my parents, and our vehicle broke down. Tim wanted to return home, but I became angry and said to him- “No! I refuse to give up my vacation!” No praying to the Lord, asking for help in our situation. (We won’t know this side of heaven how we missed out on what God may have had in store for us during that time.) We rented a car and continued our trip south. The next day, I got sick with food poisoning. It was the hand of God, and I knew it. Guess what? I gave up my vacation, since I was sick (the sickest I’ve ever been in my life) the entire time, and in the hospital the last 3-4 days of our trip. I had the last symptoms of illness just before I got on the plane to fly home (one of our friends drove down to pick up Tim and the boys).*

*The Holy Spirit let me know that it was my rebellion that was the cause of my illness. Even though I repented, I was not excused from the consequences of it. I gave up my vacation, but learned a life lesson that I’ll never forget. Did he have someone he wanted us to reach out to, or did he have someone ready to minister to us? The Lord is in control of every circumstance, and He has a reason for it. We should go to Him and ask Him what He wants to do in and through us.”*